

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

DISTRICT OF NEVADA

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Kristina M. Reeves,

Plaintiff,

V.

Martin O' Malley, Commissioner of Social Security,

Defendant.

Case No. 2:24-cv-00202-BNW

ORDER

Presently before the Court is plaintiff Kristina Reeve's application to proceed *in forma pauperis* (ECF No. 1), filed on January 29, 2024

I. *In Forma Pauperis* Application

All parties instituting any civil action, suit, or proceeding in a district court of the United States must pay a filing fee. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1914(a). An action may proceed despite a plaintiff's failure to prepay the entire fee only if the plaintiff is granted leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a). *See Rodriguez v. Cook*, 169 F.3d 1176, 1177 (9th Cir. 1999).

Ms. Reeves has submitted the declaration required by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) showing an inability to prepay fees and costs or give security for them. ECF No. 1. Accordingly, Plaintiff's request to proceed *in forma pauperis* will be granted.

The Court will next screen Plaintiff's complaint. ECF No. 1-1.

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1 **II. Screening the Complaint**

2 **A. Standard of Review**

3 Upon granting a request to proceed *in forma pauperis*, a court must screen the complaint
 4 under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2).¹ In screening the complaint, a court must identify cognizable
 5 claims and dismiss claims that are frivolous, malicious, fail to state a claim on which relief may
 6 be granted, or seek monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C.
 7 § 1915(e)(2).

8 Dismissal for failure to state a claim under § 1915(e)(2) incorporates the standard for
 9 failure to state a claim under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6). *Watison v. Carter*, 668
 10 F.3d 1108, 1112 (9th Cir. 2012). To survive § 1915 review, a complaint must “contain sufficient
 11 factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *See Ashcroft*
 12 *v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009). In considering whether the complaint is sufficient to state a
 13 claim, all allegations of material fact are taken as true and construed in the light most favorable to
 14 the plaintiff. *Wyler Summit P’ship v. Turner Broad. Sys. Inc.*, 135 F.3d 658, 661 (9th Cir. 1998)
 15 (citation omitted). Although the standard under Rule 12(b)(6) does not require detailed factual
 16 allegations, a plaintiff must provide more than mere labels and conclusions. *Bell Atlantic Corp. v.*
 17 *Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007). A formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action is
 18 insufficient. *Id.*

19 If a plaintiff’s complaint challenges a decision by the Social Security Administration,
 20 before filing a lawsuit, the plaintiff must exhaust administrative remedies. *See* 42 U.S.C.
 21 § 405(g); *see also Bass v. Social Sec. Admin.*, 872 F.2d 832, 833 (9th Cir. 1989) (per curiam)
 22 (“Section 405(g) provides that a civil action may be brought only after (1) the claimant has been
 23 party to a hearing held by the Secretary, and (2) the Secretary has made a final decision on the
 24 claim”). Generally, if the SSA denies a claimant’s application for disability benefits, the claimant
 25 may request reconsideration of the decision. If the claim is denied at the reconsideration level, a
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27 ¹ Although § 1915 largely concerns prisoner litigation, § 1915(e) applies to all *in forma pauperis*
 28 proceedings. *Calhoun v. Stahl*, 254 F.3d 845, 845 (9th Cir. 2001) (“[T]he provisions of 28 U.S.C.
 § 1915(e)(2)(B) are not limited to prisoners[.]”).

1 claimant may request a hearing before an administrative law judge. If the ALJ denies the claim, a
2 claimant may request review of the decision by the Appeals Council. If the Appeals Council
3 declines to review the ALJ's decision, a claimant may then request judicial review. *See generally*
4 20 C.F.R. §§ 404, 416.

5 Once a plaintiff has exhausted administrative remedies, she may obtain judicial review of
6 a SSA decision denying benefits by filing suit within 60 days after notice of a final decision. *Id.*
7 An action for judicial review of a determination by the SSA must be brought "in the district court
8 of the United States for the judicial district in which the plaintiff resides." *Id.* The complaint
9 should state the nature of plaintiff's disability, when plaintiff claims she became disabled, and
10 when and how she exhausted her administrative remedies. The complaint should also contain a
11 plain, short, and concise statement identifying the nature of plaintiff's disagreement with the
12 determination made by the SSA and show that plaintiff is entitled to relief.

13 A district court can affirm, modify, reverse, or remand a decision if plaintiff has exhausted
14 her administrative remedies and timely filed a civil action. However, judicial review of the
15 Commissioner's decision to deny benefits is limited to determining: (a) whether there is
16 substantial evidence in the record as a whole to support the findings of the Commissioner, and (b)
17 whether the correct legal standards were applied. *Morgan v. Commissioner of the Social Security*
18 *Adm.*, 169 F.3d 595, 599 (9th Cir. 1999).

19 **B. Analysis**

20 Here, Ms. Reeves alleges her applications for disability insurance benefits and
21 supplemental security income were denied initially, upon reconsideration, and by the
22 Administrative Law Judge ("ALJ") following a hearing. ECF No. 1-1 at 2. Plaintiff further
23 alleges that on September 26, 2023, the Appeals Council denied the request for review, and, at
24 that time, the ALJ's decision became the Commissioner's final decision. *Id.* Thus, she has
25 exhausted administrative remedies.

26 Plaintiff has filed requests for extensions to file this action but no decision has been
27 rendered. At this juncture, she believes her requests for extension will be granted. Thus, for
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1 screening purposes only, this Court will assume the requests for extensions will be granted and
 2 that filing this complaint on January 29, 2024, is within the allowable period.

3 The complaint also indicates that Plaintiff resides within the District of Nevada and the
 4 nature of her disability.² *Id.* at 1, 3.

5 Finally, the complaint includes sufficient facts to state a claim for relief, alleging that the
 6 “ALJ’ erred in rendering a decision that was not supported by substantial evidence”. *Id.* at 3.

7 Accordingly, Plaintiff alleges a cognizable claim upon which relief can be granted.

8 **IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that

9 1. Plaintiff Kristina M. Reeves’ request to proceed *in forma pauperis* (ECF
 10 No. 1) is GRANTED. Plaintiff will not be required to pay the filing fee of \$402.00.

11 2. Plaintiff is permitted to maintain this action to conclusion without the necessity of
 12 prepayment of any additional fees or costs or giving security for them. This Order granting leave
 13 to proceed *in forma pauperis* does not extend to the issuance of subpoenas at the government’s
 14 expense.

15 3. The Clerk of Court must file the Complaint.

16 4. The Clerk of Court shall provide notice of this action to the Commissioner
 17 pursuant to Rule 3 of the Supplemental Rules for Social Security.

18 5. From this point forward, Plaintiff must serve on Defendant or, if
 19 appearance has been entered by an attorney, on the attorney, a copy of every pleading, motion, or
 20 other document submitted for consideration by the Court. Plaintiff must include with the original
 21 paper submitted for filing a certificate stating the date that a true and correct copy of the
 22 document was personally served or sent by mail to the Defendant or counsel for the Defendant.
 23 The Court may disregard any paper received by a District Judge or Magistrate Judge that has not
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25 2 The Court is aware of district courts in the Ninth Circuit that require a plaintiff who proceeds *in*
 26 *forma pauperis* on social security appeals to include the onset date of her alleged disability in the
 27 complaint. *See, e.g., Montoya v. Colvin*, No. 2:16-cv-00454-RFB-NJK, 2016 WL 890922, at *2 (D. Nev.
 28 Mar. 8, 2016). While the Court believes that it is best practice to include this information and advises
 Plaintiff’s counsel to do so when filing future complaints, the Court will not dismiss Plaintiff’s complaint
 because of this omission.

1 been filed with the Clerk, and any paper received by a District Judge, Magistrate Judge, or the
2 Clerk that fails to include a certificate of service.

3 DATED: February 7, 2024

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5 BRENDAG WEKSLER
6 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE
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